

**TESTIMONY OF**

**DAVID E. NOMSEN  
PHEASANTS FOREVER, INC.**

**REPRESENTING THE VIEWS OF:**

**ARCHERY TRADE ASSOCIATION,  
ASSOCIATION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES,  
BOWHUNTING PRESERVATION ALLIANCE,  
CONGRESSIONAL SPORTSMEN'S FOUNDATION,  
DUCKS UNLIMITED, IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA,  
PHEASANTS FOREVER, QUAIL FOREVER,  
QUALITY DEER MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION,  
THEODORE ROOSEVELT CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP,  
WHITETAILED UNLIMITED**

**BEFORE THE**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON CONSERVATION, CREDIT, RURAL  
DEVELOPMENT, AND RESEARCH  
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**ON**

**CONSERVATION PROGRAMS  
OF THE  
2002 FARM BILL**

**JULY 27, 2006  
LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, my name is Dave Nomsen. I am the Vice-president of Governmental Affairs for St. Paul, MN based Pheasants Forever and I reside in Garfield, MN. I am a professional wildlife biologist with expertise in wildlife and wetland management. I have worked for Pheasants Forever since 1987 and my primary duties involve supporting a strong framework of federal policies and programs supporting natural resource conservation that complement our habitat-focused mission at Pheasants Forever.

Pheasants Forever's 650 chapters nationwide complete on average more than 20,000 individual projects annually with conservation minded farmers and ranchers on 300,000 acres. The vast majorities of these projects are completed on private lands and involve grassland establishment and management. Projects are focused on the establishment of nesting, brood rearing, and winter cover for pheasants, quail, and a wide array of wildlife.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to be here today and I am pleased to offer the shared views of many of our nations' leading wildlife conservation and sporting organizations. The groups that I represent today include the Archery Trade Association, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Bowhunting Preservation Alliance, Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, Ducks Unlimited, Izaak Walton League of America, Pheasants Forever, Quail Forever, Quality Deer Management Association, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, and Whitetails Unlimited.

Collectively, our members and supporters represent a sizable cross-section of our nations' citizenry, and we appreciate the increased role and importance of conservation in agriculture and its role in private land stewardship that has led to consensus and partnerships among government and private interests, including farm and commodity groups, individual farmers and ranchers, and hunters and anglers.

It is our view that the conservation title of the 2002 Farm Bill represents the most comprehensive array of conservation programs ever enacted in conjunctions with federal farm legislation and we recognize and appreciate the strong support from you Mr. Chairman and your subcommittee in providing this authorization. I'd like to offer a few thoughts about some of the individual program success stories that we have benefited from...

#### CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM (CRP)

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is currently celebrating 20 years as USDA's and our Nation's most successful conservation program. CRP has been a documented success for wildlife and the program is responsible for in excess of 15 million pheasants and 2.2 million waterfowl produced annually. In Iowa, CRP is estimated to produce up to 3.8 million pheasants per year. In South Dakota and Minnesota, CRP has contributed to increased pheasant harvests not experienced in over 40 years. In Montana, harvest of pheasants, gray partridge and sharp-tailed grouse has increased 55% in 1987-2002 when compared to pre-CRP levels in the period 1971-1986. Lesser prairie chickens in Kansas

have a greatly expanded range since CRP and 215 leks (breeding grounds) have been found in 10 counties north of the Arkansas River where the species was once virtually absent. A similar success story can be found in Idaho where harvest data indicates sharp-tailed grouse numbers have increased from 285 harvested in 1984 to a high of 6,200 in 1992, since enrollment of over 400,000 acres of CRP.

CRP continues to be popular with America's farmers and ranchers with strong demand during signup periods. Just last month the Farm Service Agency announced that contracts covering 13 million of the 15.5 million acres of CRP set to expire this coming September, 2007 will be extended or under new contracts. Additionally, more than 1 million acres have been accepted for enrollment in a general CRP signup conducted the spring of 2006, bringing total current enrollment to more than 36 million acres.

Because of the incredible contributions it has made to habitats for waterfowl, upland game birds, deer and wild turkeys, CRP has become a favorite of many in the sportsmen's and sportswomen's community. CRP's benefits don't stop with wildlife. CRP has reduced annual cropland loss by about 450 million tons. Additionally, according to USDA, CRP provides the following benefits:

- Soil productivity benefits - \$162 million
- Hunting migratory waterfowl - \$122 million
- Reducing runoff from fields - \$392 million
- Viewing wildlife - \$929 million

CRP is credited for protecting 170,000 miles of streams and restoring 2 million acres of wetlands and adjacent buffers. All of the above benefits are realized at a modest average rental rate of \$49.00 per acre. We support continuing the vast documented benefits of CRP and urge reauthorization at 45 million acres, as was the original program authorization.

## WETLANDS RESERVE PROGRAM (WRP)

The Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) was established by Congress in the 1990 Farm Bill and reauthorized in 1996 and 2002. In the 2002 bill, the national aggregate cap for WRP was set at 2,275,000 acres nationwide, a significant increase over the previously authorized maximum of 1,075,000. We applaud Congress, and this Subcommittee in particular, for their leadership in responding to landowner and producer interest in this ever-popular provision of the Farm Bill. As of January 2006, 1,752,045 acres had been enrolled in WRP in all 50 states and Puerto Rico. Nationwide, demand for the program continues to exceed the annual acreage authorization (250,000 acres) by a factor of 3:1.

WRP lands provide for voluntary, incentive-based conservation of wetland habitats and provide societal benefits such as improved water quality, increased flood storage capacity and enhanced wildlife habitat, in addition to recreational opportunity.

The Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley portions of Arkansas, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Mississippi comprise one of the most important waterfowl wintering areas in North America wintering at least 5 million ducks and geese annually. WRP has restored winter flooding on at least 45,000 acres. In Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi, WRP has

reforested more than 400,000 acres of marginal farmland, providing habitat for a variety of wildlife. White-tailed deer populations are high on WRP lands within days of planting, and as the forest matures Eastern Wild Turkeys return to the land, providing outstanding hunting opportunities.

Partnerships between state and federal agencies, wildlife conservation groups and landowners have proven to be the key to success of WRP throughout this country. WRP restores and protects wetland habitats and provides significant wildlife habitat. WRP has seen strong demand by landowners and we support enrollment of 250,000 acres per year.

#### WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVES PROGRAM (WHIP)

WHIP was authorized in the 1996 Farm Bill and was funded in 1998. Administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, WHIP helps landowners promote healthy wildlife populations by developing upland, wetland, riparian, and aquatic habitats on private lands. WHIP is particularly valuable in states such as the Northeast where land values and the acreages in working lands render other conservation programs less applicable. Numerous WHIP projects are successful partnerships between federal and state agencies, non-governmental organizations, and farmers and landowners. WHIP projects have been completed on 2.8 million acres under 18,000 different contracts. We supported WHIP at \$100 million per year during negotiations over the 2002 Farm Bill.

#### GRASSLAND RESERVE PROGRAM (GRP)

GRP helps farmers protect and restore grasslands while maintaining the areas as grazing lands. The program has a goal of helping conserve, restore, and protect up to 2 million acres and received strong demand from ranchers and landowners. GRP provides an incentive to maintain and enhance the contributions of working grasslands and supports the conservation of those prairie wildlife species that depend on these habitats. In 2004, over 9,000 applications for 6.2 million acres were unfunded. The program is strongly supported by our organizations. Due to the overwhelming demand for GRP and the public benefits related to the protection of native grasslands, the program should be continued and increased funding should be considered.

#### OTHER ISSUES

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to raise several other issues that our groups hope to address during deliberations over the 2007 Farm Bill. The first is that of land conversion, where we are concerned about the continuing conversion of native prairies and noncropland to the production of subsidized commodity crops. We hope to work with the Committee to address this issue. We are supportive of both the swampbuster and sodbuster provisions of the current Farm Bill and support both programs' continuation.

We are also concerned about diminishing access to privately-owned lands for our nation's hunters. We hope to work with you to address this area of growing concern for

current and future generations of sportsmen and sportswomen. We support provisions similar to the “Open Fields” legislation that would provide financial assistance to states to develop or augment voluntary programs encouraging wildlife management, habitat development, and access for hunting and fishing on privately owned land. We will be providing you and your staff with more detailed information on each of these areas of concern in the near future.

I would also like to express our desire to address program administration. We like to talk about how program authorizations are only the starting point for conservation and that we are not successful until programs are “in-the-ground” with conservation-minded farmers and ranchers. We believe that both non-governmental organizations with expertise such as many of our organizations and personnel from state fish and wildlife agencies are part of the solution to more efficient and effective program implementation. We look forward to additional discussion with you and your staff about how we can work in closer partnership with federal agencies and others to effectively deliver strong conservation programs.

In the next few months many of our organizations will be adopting detailed blueprints for the conservation title of the next Farm Bill. We hope to build upon the proven success of programs like CRP, WRP, WHIP, and GRP. We look forward to providing the Committee with additional information on each of these programs and others as we work together toward a strong conservation title as an integral component of the next Farm Bill. Thank-you for the opportunity to testify here today.